DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 444 923 SO 032 083

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TITLE This Lawless Spirit: Teaching the History of American Protest Music.
PUB DATE 2000-00-00
NOTE 13p.
PUB TYPE Reference Materials - Bibliographies (131) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Bibliographies; Discographies; Higher Education; *Popular Culture; *Popular Music; *Songs; Team Teaching; *United States History
IDENTIFIERS College of Mount Saint Joseph OH; *Music History

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the rationale for a new course in the history of American protest music which was offered during 1999 at the College of Mount St. Joseph in Ohio. Noting that the course was team taught by a U.S. history professor and a librarian with expertise in the area, the paper states that the course aimed to survey U.S. history through songs of protest and complaint, thereby telling the history of the United States from the bottom up. The paper lists learning outcomes and states that the course met twice a week for 75 minutes with an enrollment of 21 students. The class examined the following topics: What Is Protest Music?; Spirituals and Work Songs; Songs about Racism; Songs of the Wobblies; Songs of the Depression; Songs of Aunt Molly Jackson; Songs of Sarah Ogan Gunning; Songs of Woody Guthrie; People's Songs and the American Left; Songs of Pete Seeger; Songs of Bob Dylan; Anti-War Songs; Vietnam's Aftermath; The Talking Blues; Songs of the Civil Rights Movement; Songs about the Environment; Songs of Feminism; and Contemporary Protest Music. The paper contains an extensive discography and a 29-item bibliography. (BT)

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This Lawless Spirit:
Teaching the History of American Protest Music

As early as the fourth century BC, Plato acknowledged the power of music and its "lawless spirit" in his *Republic*. Music, he warns, "spreads imperceptibly to manners and pursuits; and from thence with gathering force invades men's dealings with one another, and next goes on to attack the laws and the constitution with wanton recklessness, until it ends by overthrowing the whole structure of public and private life." In the last year of the twentieth century, the College of Mount St. Joseph offered a course on the history of American protest music, confident that while society might not be overthrown by teaching such material, a number of students might be edified by it.

Preliminary research indicated that we would find few syllabi after which to model our own course. Courses devoted entirely to protest songs are rarely included in campus curriculums. Only two such courses were identified, and their scope was much more limited than ours would be, treating protest music from only 1965 to the present. (See the following web sites http://www.wfu.edu/~dixonpa/syllabus.html, and http://gater.sfsu.edu/issue10_s99/article/feature.html.)

Cross-listed in Music and History, the Mount St. Joseph course was offered to honor students and team-taught by an American History Professor and a librarian with expertise in the area. The course aimed to survey American history through songs of protest and complaint, thereby telling the history of America from the bottom up. Learning outcomes included: a.) demonstrating knowledge of songs of complaint and protest within their various historical contexts and musical traditions; b.) understanding the uses and values of song as a political weapon; c.) appreciating the role of the musician in affecting social and cultural change; and d.) analyzing protest songs for their message, musical style, and effectiveness.

The course met twice a week for seventy-five minutes and attracted an enrollment of 21 students, fairly typical for our institution and small enough for the class to be conducted as a seminar. The material was taught largely in chronological order, by the date of the song's authorship, or, in some cases, its recording.

More specifically, the course was presented in the following divisions. The number of class periods devoted to each division is given in parentheses. Artists and songs featured in each division are also listed.

What is Protest Music? (2)
John Prine: "The Great Compromise", "Your Flag Decal Won't Get You Into Heaven Anymore"
Pete Seeger: "Little Boxes", "We Shall Not Be Moved", "Peg and Awl"

Spirituals and Work Songs (1)

Seniorlites: "Run, Mary, Run"
Richard Dyer-Bennet: "Go Down, Moses"
Gospel Harmonettes: "Jesus is on the Mainline"

Songs about Racism (1)

Bob Dylan: "Oxford Town"
Big Bill Broonzy: "Black, White, and Brown Blues"
Pete Seeger: "No Irish Need Apply"

Songs of the Wobblies (1)

Pete Seeger: "Casey Jones, the Union Scab"
Cisco Houston: "Preacher and the Slave", "The Tramp"
Hazel Dickens: "Rebel Girl"
Judy Collins: "Bread and Roses"
Manhattan Chorus: "Solidarity Forever"
Joan Baez: "Joe Hill"
Entertainment Workers IU 630: "There is Power in a Union"

Songs of the Depression (1)

New Lost City Ramblers: "No Depression in Heaven", "White House Blues", "FDR's Back Again", "Old Age Pension Check", "Serves Them Fine", "Sales Tax On the Women"
The Weavers: "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?"

Songs of Aunt Molly Jackson (1)

Aunt Molly Jackson: "Ragged Hungry Blues, Parts 1 and 2"
New Lost City Ramblers: "Join the CIO"
The Weavers: "Which Side Are You On?"

Songs of Sarah Ogan Gunning (1)

Sarah Ogan Gunning: "I'm Going to Organize, Baby Mine"
Pete Seeger: "The Death of Harry Sims"
Video: *Dreadful Memories : the Life of Sarah Ogan Gunning*

Songs of Woody Guthrie (2)

Woody Guthrie: "I Ain't Got No Home", "Talking Dust Bowl", "Pastures of Plenty", "This Land is Your Land", "Jesus Christ", "1913 Massacre", "Do Re Mi"
Bruce Springsteen: "Vigilante Man"
Judy Collins: "Deportees"
Video: *Woody Guthrie*

People's Songs and the American Left (1)

Almanac Singers: "Ballad of October 16", "Plow Under", "Talking Union"
Tom Rush: "I Don't Want Your Millions, Mister"

Songs of Pete Seeger (1)

The Kingston Trio: "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?"
The Byrds: "Turn, Turn, Turn"
Pete Seeger: "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy"
Peter, Paul, and Mary: "If I Had A Hammer"
Video: *Pure Pete Seeger*

Songs of Bob Dylan (2)

Peter, Paul, and Mary: "Blowing in the Wind"
Bob Dylan: "The Times They Are A-Changing", "Neighborhood Bully", "Union Sundown", "Only a Pawn in Their Game", "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll", "Hurricane"

Anti-War Songs (2)

Country Joe and the Fish: "I Believe I'm Fixing to Die Rag"
Creedence Clearwater Revival: "Fortunate Son"
Tom Paxton: "Jimmy Newman"
Phil Ochs: "I Ain't Marching Anymore"
Donovan: "Universal Soldier"
Barry McGuire: "Eve of Destruction
Chuck Rosenberg: "Boonie Rat Song"
Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young: "Ohio"

Vietnam's Aftermath (1)

John Prine: "Sam Stone", "Take the Star Out of the Window"
Iris Dement: "There's A Wall in Washington"
Steve Goodman: "Ballad of Penny Evans"

The Talking Blues (1)

Bob Dylan: "Talking WWIII Blues"
John Greenway: "Talking Miner", "I Like Ike", "Talking Social Worker"

Songs of the Civil Rights Movement (2)

Joan Baez: "Birmingham Sunday"
Freedom Singers: "We Are Soldiers"
Pete Seeger: "We Shall Overcome"
Video: "Eyes on the Prize"

Songs about the Environment (1)

John Prine: "Paradise"
Tom Paxton: "Whose Garden Was This?"
Pete Seeger: "God Bless the Grass"
Joni Mitchell: "Big Yellow Taxi"
Cat Stevens: "Where Do the Children Play?"

Songs of Feminism (1)

Helen Reddy: "I am Woman"
Tracy Chapman: "Behind the Wall"
Dixiechicks: "Good-bye, Earl"
Peggy Seeger: "I'm Gonna Be an Engineer"
Ani DiFranco: "Not a Pretty Girl"

Contemporary Protest Music (2)

Iris Dement: "Wasteland of the Free"
Bruce Springsteen: "Ghost of Tom Joad"
The Pretenders: "My City Was Gone"
Jackson Browne: "Lives in the Balance"
Cheryl Wheeler: "Don't Forget the Guns"
Arlo Guthrie: "Victor Jara"
Mary-Chapin Carpenter: "Stones in the Road"

Students were evaluated in the following manner:

40%	Reaction papers on weekly topic (eight total, worth five points each)
40%	Final paper on instructor-approved topic
10%	Oral presentation on same topic as Final Paper
10%	Attendance

What would the instructors change were the course to be offered again? The lack of a general textbook on protest songs resulted in a sometimes-inconsistent list of readings. A more varied approach to class presentations might also better sustain student interest. This became apparent whenever videos were used. Finally, it must be confessed that the instructors' disappointment in student performance betrayed an idealism all too apparent in many of the featured songs.

A discography and bibliography follow.

Discography

Sample entry.

Author of song. Performer of song. Title of song. Release information of LP or CD used in class.

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